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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ROUNDDUP,
SEPTEMBER 19

REF: Almaty 3295

1. (U) This is the first in a series of weekly election roundups, in advance of Kazakhstan's December 4, 2005 presidential elections. Items were drawn primarily from the local press and media.

The Gloves Are Off

2. (U) "I am determined to run for the presidency," was the headline of an open letter to President Nazarbayev published August 17 by "For a Just Kazakhstan" (FJK) leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbay. The statement was issued in response to a letter to Tuyakbay from the Almaty City procurator, warning against illegal pre-election campaigning. In response to the warning, Tuyakbay accused Nazarbayev, saying "I consider this letter as proof of your inability to face honest political competition. Your trips to the regions represent a pre-election show, when huge budgetary funds are spent to depict the 'people's happiness,' thousands of working people and schoolchildren are mobilized. Judging by the number of populist promises, your [February] address to the nation was a pre-election statement. State-controlled newspapers and TV channels unrestrainedly glorify your 'exceptional nature' and 'irreplaceability.' Your Akims and your information-propagandist teams, recruited from state officials, agitate people for your candidacy."

3. (U) The statement continued "The system of power created by you organically rejects free and fair elections. This is why officials and criminals with impunity attack members of the 'For a Just Kazakhstan' movement, beat people, and instigate disorder and provocations, as in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Shymkent and Atyrau." It concluded with a statement: "I will take part in the election to challenge the authoritarian and corrupt system of power you have created, to stop arbitrariness and lawlessness in our country, and to say 'NO' to the unfair economy, which made a group of cronies extremely reach after theft of national resources and plunged the other citizens into poverty."

4. (SBU) Media coverage of Tuyakbay's statement was uneven. Only a handful of opposition news outlets covered it, and many of them focused only on the statement of his intention to run, omitting his accusations against Nazarbayev.

Applications and Tests of Candidates

5. (U) As of September 14, four candidates have filed their applications for registration: the current president Nursultan Nazarbayev, senator Ualikhan Kaysarov, opposition leader Zharmakhan Tuyakbay, and independent candidate/political unknown Oten Salim Sagyndykuly. The CEC has announced that all four have met the requirements for registration, including passing their Kazakh language tests. The next step in the registration process involves collection of signatures of support; candidates must obtain the signatures of at least one percent of the voters in each oblast.

6. (SBU) When Tuyakbay filed his nomination documents with the CEC on September 12, accompanied by Bulat Abilov and Tolen Tokhtasynov, he presented a copy of FJK's resolution on the need for changes to the election process. He stressed the need for the composition of the CEC to be changed to include representatives of candidates running in elections. Tuyakbay then met with CEC Chairman Onalsyn Zhumabekov (who he was procurator in Mangistau Oblast when Tuyakbay was Procurator General) behind the closed doors. According to Tuyakbay, he raised some issues about the ongoing election campaign.

Other Likely Candidates

7. (U) On September 13 the press service of the Ak Zhol party, headed by Alikhan Baimenov, reported on the

meetings of its branches around the country where party activists discussed the upcoming presidential election. According to the report, in almost every region party

leaders urged Baimenov to run. It is likely that the September 20 Ak Zhol national congress will nominate Baimenov as a candidate.

18. (U) The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK) plans to nominate eccentric MP Yerasyl Abylkasymov as its candidate during its September 17 congress in Almaty. The 57-year old Abylkasymov is an active advocate of the government in Parliament and a harsh critic of the West. He initiated the recent broad investigation of international organizations working in Kazakhstan. Abylkasymov has a university degree in medicine. He was elected to Mazhilis (lower house) in 2001 and reelected in fall 2004. Abylkasymov has been a member of the CPPK since its founding in spring 2004.

19. (U) Other minor candidates who have announced their intention to run include former wrestling coach Zhaksybay Bazilbayev, who withdrew from the 1999 presidential elections in favor of Nazarbayev, and chairman of the Tabigat (Nature) green movement Mels Yeleusizov, who ran unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1992, 1994, 1995 and 1999.

President Warns Against Interference from Abroad...

10. (SBU) President Nazarbayev has spoken out several times to warn against violations of the law in the upcoming elections. Some of his comments have directly accused the opposition, such as his September 7 remarks to the press that he assumed the opposition had asked former President Clinton for money, despite the fact that foreign funding of political parties is illegal. Speaking about recently-rejected NGO legislation at the Civic Forum on September 12, Nazarbayev stated "They [parliament] have seen the dangers that arose in neighboring countries when foreign NGOs insolently pumped in money and destabilized society. The state was defenseless against this and what is happening now in these countries you all know very well."

11. (SBU) In comments to the media after taking his Kazakh language test at the CEC on September 14, Nazarbayev underscored the importance of September 10 decree on transparency and fairness of the upcoming elections. He highlighted the fact that the decree tasks law enforcement with making sure that candidates, their representatives, and international and local NGOs all observe the law. "We won't allow any interference into the country's internal affairs via funding to political parties and public organizations, or via support to any candidate by international or local NGOs - it is banned in our Constitution," Nazarbayev said. He echoed the same idea in his September 14 remarks at the Asar party congress, saying that Kazakhstan will not let foreign NGOs violate its laws, and that counter-actions against such violations shall not be considered as a violation of anyone's rights.

... And Issues Decree on Free and Fair Elections

12. (U) As reported reftel, on September 9 President Nazarbayev issued a decree providing for "Measures on Realization of Citizens' Electoral Rights." The measures include realization of citizens' constitutional rights to elect and to be elected, timely financing the election, prompt response to complaints about violations of the election legislation, assistance provided by local akims to election commissions with compiling voters' lists, accreditation of foreign observers and representatives of mass media, and the maintenance of security and order by the Interior Ministry.

Disagreement among Pro-Presidential Parties

13. (SBU) There have been some signs of discord among pro-presidential parties. Channel 31 reported that acting Otan chairman B. Zhumagulov claimed that he had been named Chairman of the President's campaign headquarters. However, other sources close to the Presidential Administration reported that other politicians, including Dariga Nazarbayeva, are being considered for this post. In

the meantime, all five major pro-presidential parties -- Otan, Asar, DPK, Agrarian and Civic -- have sent representatives to work at campaign HQ.

Bloc Forms to Support Nazarbayev

14. (U) At its September 14 congress, the Asar party -headed by first daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva - voted unanimously to support Nazarbayev's intention to run for reelection and to join the "People's Coalition of Kazakhstan" electoral bloc. President Nazarbayev attended the congress; in his remarks praised Asar as a modern party with "good prospects."

"For a Just Kazakhstan" Demands Fair Elections

15. (U) At its September 10 congress in Almaty where it nominated Tuyakbay, the "For a Just Kazakhstan" movement adopted two resolutions demanding fair and free presidential elections and the immediate release of Galymzhan Zhakiyanov. The resolution on elections calls for an end to harassment, intimidation and repression of opposition activists all over the country and for freedom of speech and mass media. It also demands equal access for opposition forces to state TV channels Khabar and Kazakhstan-1, the inclusion of opposition representatives in election commissions at every level, the abolition of e-voting, the participation of local and international election observers, and an end to the use of "administrative resources" to put pressure on voters.

16. (SBU) In a September 14 interview with Kommersant newspaper, Tuyakbay warned Russia not to count on Nazarbayev. "[Russia] should count not on an individual, but on the country as a whole. Tomorrow if the United States puts pressure on [Nazarbayev] through 'Kazakhgate,' nobody can predict how he will act."

Survey of Electorate

17. (SBU) The turnout in the upcoming presidential elections will be 73.9%, according to a poll conducted by the FJK-affiliated Center for Social Technologies (CST) in 30 cities and oblasts. The CST questioned 2,000 people of various ethnic origins. According to the survey, 11.8% will not vote and 11.2% have not made up their minds. More than 80% of rural residents plan to vote. The highest numbers of people not planning to vote are in Astana, Almaty, and Atyrau Oblast (from 19 to 28%). In Almaty, 56% of residents plan to vote and 14% have not decided.

18. (SBU) According to a late August poll by the Association of Political Scientists (ASIP), 57.1% of city residents and 64.2% of rural residents expressed their willingness to vote. One-third of the 2,513 people questioned were ready to support Nazarbayev, and less than 3% expressed support for opposition candidate Zharmakhan Tuyakbay.

Several New NGOs to Monitor Elections

19. (U) On September 5, a group of well-known human rights advocates, journalists, and sociologists announced the creation of the "For a Fair Election" election monitoring group. Kazakhstanian Human Rights Bureau head Yevgeniy Zhovtis stated "We belong to neither the opposition nor the government." Other well-known participants include independent journalist Sergey Duvanov, political scientist Sabit Zhusupov, and journalist Ibrash Nusupbayev. Duvanov stated that in addition to monitoring the elections, the group will examine why people do not want to vote. Duvanov also said that the movement would seek grants from foreign organizations in order to remain independent of all sides.

20. (U) Fourteen local NGOs have united to form the "League of Kazakhstan Voters," with the aim of impartial monitoring the upcoming presidential election. Natalya Chumakova, director of the Almaty Center for the Support of Democracy and wife of DCK activist Petr Svoik,

announced the creation of the new organization at a September 13 press conference in Almaty. The league intends to collect donations, but not from individuals or organizations affiliated with political parties.

21. (U) On September 15, another group of well-known public figures announced the creation of a public committee to monitor the upcoming elections. This group is thought to be closer to the GOK than the others noted above. Participants include well-known poet and Kazakhstanian representative to UNESCO Olzhas Suleymenov, Senator Kuanysh Sultanov, Director of the National Library Murat Auezov, Director of the Uighur Theater Murat

Akhmadiev, President of "Channel-31" Media Holding
Armanzhan Baytasov, Chairman of Cinematography Union Igor
Vovnyanko, Editor-in-chief of the Central Asia Monitor
weekly newspaper Bigeldy Gabdullin, and President of the
Academy of Nutrition Turegeldy Sharmanov.

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